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FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM Today Show STATION WRC TV
NBC Network

DATE September 2, 1983 7:00 AM CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT Adm. Stansfield Turner/Korean Plane

BRYANT GUMBEL: And as we speak of the incident in the air yesterday, the one question the world most wants to -- the Soviets to answer is, why? In lieu of that answer we're dealing this morning only in educated guesses.

One man whose guess is more educated than most is Admiral Stansfield Turner, he is a military analyst, he's a former CIA director, and he's in our Washington studios this morning.

Good morning, Admiral.

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: Good morning, Bryant.

GUMBEL: Admiral, what's a decent answer to the question of why they did this, was this simply a matter of sensitivity to intrusion of air space?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, the Soviets are paranoid about intrusions into their country. They've been invaded a lot. They've shown this kind of sensitivity previously in air and sea incidents.

In addition, though, you've got to recognize that the Soviets place the interest of the state above those of the individual. That's part of communism. And they don't put the same high regard on the individual and his life as we do. They have a different set of values. They're a quite different country with a different outlook

GUMBEL: Admiral, this incident can't be divorced from the location where it took place. What can you tell us of Soviet enplacements on the Kamchatka Peninsula, or on Sakhalin Island?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, the Kamchatka Peninsula is a major military place. They have a naval base there, which is the only one in the Far East that gives them direct access to the ocean. And they have a missile impact area there where they fire their test missiles. So they're very sensitive about Kamchatka.

GUMBEL: And that plane, as we can see, from that graphic, went over the southern tip -- it's believed to have gone over the southern tip of Kamchatka Peninsula and then across Sakhalin Island.

ADMIRAL TURNER: That's correct. And right in here's where the naval base is.

GUMBEL: As we continue to keep that shot -- I've got to ask you -- even if you had a mind to, could anything be gained by observing that area from the air?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, I think that it's just a very poor way to collect intelligence from a commercial airliner in the middle of the night. So -- and it's a very risky way, as facts have proved, and as we saw in 1978, when they shot down a previous Korean airliner. From the Soviet point of view, though, and I'm not trying to apologize for them, this being the second time a Korean civilian airliner has intruded into their airspace, it has reinforced their normal paranoia.

GUMBEL: If you were they would you discount totally the possibility this Korean plane was something other than just lost?

ADMIRAL TURNER: No, as a Soviet, I would not, as I say, because they are so suspicious and because this is a second incident of a similar type.

GUMBEL: When Secretary Shultz confirmed the shooting yesterday, he in part revealed the sophistication of our eavesdropping equipment. Did he tell the Soviets anything they didn't know before?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes, I think he did. He told them the specific capabilities we had in this specific area at this time. I'm sure they understood we had general capabilities of that sort but he gave them some very specific data.

GUMBEL: In the long run, how detrimental is that to our sense of security.

ADMIRAL TURNER: I think it is a damaging report; the most sensitive disclosure of this sort that I've ever seen by a public official.

GUMBEL: Admiral, can you give us any insight into the orders intercept pilots have when they are sent aloft to intercept a craft that has intruded into airspace?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, we certainly don't know what the Soviet orders are but precedent -- again, going back to the 1978 incident -- is that they are to go through the motions that you've described on the program this morning: waving their wings, flashing their lights, trying to tell the plane to follow it and then putting their landing gear down, which says to the plane, land.

This was at night, yet it seems difficult to think that they couldn't have got that through.

GUMBEL: I guess I asked you that because, what is the likelihood that either the pilot or that someone on the ground exceeded authority? I guess what I'm asking you is, how certain are you that these orders came from the Kremlin, or that they were made at a mid-level stage?

ADMIRAL TURNER: Because the incident took place over two and a half hours, there's little question that it could have and should have been known in the Kremlin.

It's my personal opinion that the Soviets -- again, particularly because they were so embarrassed in 1978 -- probably delegated authority in this area to shoot to the local commander. Whether he's the one who finally made the actual decision or not we'll probably never know.

GUMBEL: Final quick note. Given the technology available, any way the Soviets could not have known that that was a commercial airliner?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I would think just not possible at all; both from the track that it was on, the fact that it's on a scheduled time, they know that same flight comes every so often, and the size and shape of the plane and all.

GUMBEL: Admiral Stansfield Turner, thank you for joining us this morning.